The Bloomfield Times.

FRANK MORTIMER, Editor and Proprietor. | AN INDEPENDENT FAMILY NEWSPAPER. | Terms: IN ADVANCE. One Dollar per Year.

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The Bloomfield Times.

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BY

FRANK MORTIMER.

SUBSCRIPTION TERMS.

ONE DOLLAR PER YEAR!

IN ADVANCE.

THE UNTRIED GOVERNESS.

A Step-Daughter's Experience.

CONCLUDED.

"GENTLY, Noddy. People don't like to see much of this sort of thing in any but the rich."

"Then people are wrong, and must be shown so. But what I want to say is this: if you have lost all your money, you may have expenses to meet, and one thing and another that may harass you, and prevent your beginning clear."

Mr. Frank nodded. "Quite so," he said, and shook his head gravely.

"Well, would you mind—that is, if I lent you twenty pounds of my property, would you be certain sure to pay it back to me again somewhere? I can't spare more very well, as I want ten pounds of it to get myself ready for the situation I am looking for. But I thought it might come in handy."

"Just so," said Mr. Frank, and shook his head again gravely; "there's no doubt about it."

"You see, I should not have proposed it, but I should charge you interest and that would do away with all obligation."

"Entirely," Mr. Frank coincided; "that would be a regular commercial transaction. And the interest would be?"

"Three per cent.—the same as the bank gives."

"And you would require my note of hand for the amount?"

"No," said Noddy, laughing at the idea as absurd; "I can trust you for that."

"What! for nearly all your property?"

"Yes; because it would not ruin *me* if I lost it."

"Well, I will take your money, Noddy—it will be very acceptable—and I won't cheat you."

"No," said Noddy; "I hope you won't, for I look upon it as safe as the bank."

Mr. Frank laughed.

So it was settled that Noddy should draw her money from the bank on the following day.

"You are a good little friend, Noddy," Mr. Frank said, as they walked home.

"No," Noddy said; "I hope I should have done as much for any one."

Noddy meant to tell the truth. May be she "hoped" she would; but I am not at all certain she would. However, she had never before felt so rich as at the prospect of helping Mr. Frank. Her twenty pounds seemed to her quite a large property, and she almost jumped to the conclusion that it would go a good way towards making a prosperous man of Mr. Geogagan again.

Mrs. Muciller and Julia returned from the picnic party rather bored. It was "awfully slow," Julia decided; and "so many stuck-up girls that it was quite horrid."

Mr. Geogagan spent the evening listening to Julia's music with as much apparent appreciation and interest as though he had not been unsuccessful in his attempt to raise the loan he wished from Mr. Sharing.

One day passed—two days—three days, with little worthy of remark. Then Mrs. Muciller, becoming impatient at receiving no replies to the advertisement respecting Norah Cray, made a call on Mrs. Sharing who imparted the bit of news she had been burning to tell, but yet treasured up for her last communication—namely, that on the most reliable authority her Indian nephew was not worth a dozen rupees; and that he had actually attempted to raise a loan on his prospects of marriage with Miss Muciller.

"Quite absurd, you know," said Mrs. Sharing; "but it just shows what he is worth."

"But I know he has money," Mrs. Muciller protested indignantly. "I am certain of it. That Reclamation Company is a wonderfully good thing, and I know his money is in that. I have made every inquiry."

"Exactly. But that is the very reason. The Anglo-Waddy Company has gone to entire ruin. My husband says the shares are not worth a sixpence."

This was a great blow for Mrs. Muciller, especially remembering that she had only herself to blame for promulgating the report of Julia's engagement to this adventurer. The one little bit of comfort she had remaining was, that Mr. Geogagan had been as much deceived in thinking Julia had expectations as she had been with him. But that did not mend the matter, which presented itself to her mind in the light of a most atrocious take-in, and she said so.

"Well, but," said Mrs. Sharing, "the Company was prospering when he left India, and there is no reason to suppose he has been guilty of intentional deception."

"What has that to do with it? How does that make any reparation for the injury it has caused to my daughter's prospects? Everybody knows of the engagement, and people will talk. O, how they will talk! It is abominable! It will be most prejudicial to Julia to break it off now; but it must be done at any cost.—And a most fortunate escape it will be."

Mrs. Muciller returned to tea at Braithfield Villa, outwardly calm and cool, but as may be imagined, in not the most placid serenity of mind. She made not the slightest alteration in her behavior to Mr. Geogagan, who appeared in very fair spirits, and entirely unsuspicious of the coming storm.

Mrs. Muciller was a woman of quick action; a course once resolved on with her was put into execution immediately. When tea was finished she blandly requested Noddy and Julia to leave the room. Her manner of doing this was so marked that had Mr. Frank not been deeply interested in a book he was reading on the sofa, he might have had his suspicions aroused.

When they were alone Mrs. Muciller commenced: "Mr. Geogagan, will do me the favor to pay attention to a few words I have to say?"

"I am all attention," said Mr. Frank, dropping his book and drawing himself comfortably on the sofa-cushion.

"When you invited yourself as my guest I had not the slightest idea that you would place me in a false position."

"Nor I," said Mr. Frank resignedly, his hands languidly crossed, with the air of a martyr.

"I had no idea that you would avail yourself of my hospitality to betray the confidence naturally reposed in a visitor."

Mrs. Muciller paused expecting an answer; but Mr. Frank was silent.

"Or," she continued, "I should not have extended towards you that hospitality.—You will excuse my being plain, but it is my duty to be so."

Mr. Frank extended his hands and bent his head, as deprecating such an apology.

"Your conduct towards my daughter Julia has been most heartily cruel."

"Excuse me," said Mr. Frank.

"Pardon me; I don't wish to be interrupted. Most heartlessly cruel. You have paid her marked attentions at home and abroad, and have given currency to a most undesirable report that you were engaged to her, without any reference whatever, to my wishes and feelings. I do not, of course pretend to know the extent to which you have influenced her mind, or the hold you may have succeeded in obtaining over her affections; but I must say you have no right to promulgate a report that, in my opinion, is injurious to my daughter's prospects."

"I have paid your daughter no more attention than ordinary courtesy to a relative would dictate. As to an engagement, I have not thought it neccessary to make a reference to you on the subject, Mrs. Muciller, not having had the slightest notion of such a thing, until I heard the report you allude to, which certainly did not orignate from me."

"It is most singular how such a report could have obtained currency had you given no occasion for it," said Mrs. Muciller.

"There I agree with you; and significant also," said Mr. Frank.

"And significant also. Had your attentions to Julia been restricted to home courtesies, it might have been less so. But when you seek, on strength of such a report, previously disseminated by you, to use your rumored engagement as the security on which to borrow money, it becomes still more than significant; it becomes conclusive of something that is detestably disgraceful."

Mrs. Muciller paused, wishing for an answer to a shot that combined truth and falsehood so deftly that she knew it would tell; but there was only one answer Mr. Frank could have given at the moment. If it had been a man who had stung him like this, Mr. Frank would have knocked him down; but as it was a lady, he was silent.

"In entering my household," she proceeded, "you led me tacitly to understand that you were at least in as prosperous a position as I had reason to believe you were some years ago. It is useless to say you did not actually state this in so many words; you led me to believe it, and took no pains to dissipate such a belief. Such conduct I can only characterize as the basest duplicity. You then sought, by the cunning artifice of a hinted engagement with my daughter, to mortgage her expectations as well as to injure her prospects. Such proceedings I can only stigmatize as contemptible and systematic villiany. Your future course whilst you remain in my house—"

But Frank just walked into the hall, took his hat, and scribbling a pencilled address on an envelope, gave it to the servant for Miss Cray, and walked out, leaving his luggage and personal effects to be sent after him.

The note contained only an acknowledgment of the sum of twenty pounds borrowed from Norah.

People did talk; and the bitterness of it to Mrs. Muciller was that it was all her own doing. However, she was equal to the occasion. She had made one attempt to bring Julia out at eighteen with indifferent success. As a shop-keeper, whose goods have been exposed in his window for a few weeks, and become a trifle soiled, will remove them to the back of his shop, that they may come out fresh again by and by, so Mrs. Muciller, whose daughter had become a trifle fly-blown by the exposure, resolved to send Julia to France to finish her education for the second time, to come out fresh at eighteen in another twelvemonth. It took a few weeks to complete the necessary arrangements for Julia's departure, during which time Mrs. Muciller's attention was distracted from Noddy's affairs. The only *sentiment* of emotion at the *contre-temps* exhibited by Julia consisted in a renewed expression, in song, of something like regret that the "two leaves were parted in the stream;" but as to any *feeling* of emotion, she probably had about as much as the "other leaf," that "floated forward all alone."

Towards the close of September, a very few days after Miss Julia had become a *pensionnaire* of a Parisian establishment, Mrs. Muciller pounced upon an advertisement in the local paper.

"At last!" she exclaimed to Noddy; "here is the very thing for you. It seems like a providence. Here have we been trying the London papers for weeks, and the very identical thing turns up in our own little print. I'll read it:—

"'WANTED, A GOVERNESS — The advertiser wishes to obtain instruction for a child turned eight years old. English only required. Address W., Pinewood, Lyndhurst, Hants.'"

"Just what you want,—no accomplishments whatever, mentioned; so write directly."

"Yes," said Noddy, "I will. I like the look of that advertisement. There is not too much said, and not too much required."

Noddy wrote three or four notes before she could manage one to suit the conciseness of the advertisement. The one she sent was this:—

"To W.

September 26, 18—

"I think I am competent to undertake the situation. NORA CRAY."

Return of post brought the following reply:—

September 26, 18—.

"To Miss NORA CRAY.

"If Miss Cray is of that opinion, she is requested to be at Lyndhurst Station at 7.15 P. M., to-morrow. Carriage will be sent. W."

"P. M.?" Mrs. Muciller remarked. "Not a very suitable time to engage a governess. However, this is not my affair."

Noddy was so really anxious to secure a situation for which she thought herself qualified, that she would have gone had it been M. M.,—twelve o'clock at midnight."

"You will not make any frivolous objections about accepting this situation," Mrs. Muciller said. "The family whoever they are seem evidently disposed to engage you, and you will understand I have no farther occasion for your services with me. Should you be engaged at once, I do not even see that it would be needful for you to return. You forgot yourself more than once in your demeanor to a visitor of mine; it is not my wish you should have another opportunity of making a similar mistake. If you return at all, it will be your own fault; and if you suffer for it, it will be a consequence of your own folly."

"I will really try," returned Noddy; "for indeed, I am in earnest for employment. But you will not be angry if I return unsuccessfully? You would not turn me away?"

"If you return I do not think I could turn you away. People might talk. I should not turn you out of doors; but if, after once showing you a separate path from my own, and you refuse it, there should be a way I have not yet tried to make you feel my resentment, I will try to find that way. Until you had the prospect of a situation, I have restrained myself because to exhibit my feeling would be useless and purposeless. Now, let me tell you that I know something of your deceit and treachery. Thanks to your poisoning Mr. Geogagan's mind against my daughter Julia, he left in the sudden and disgraceful manner he did. You need not pretend to innocence. You were walking with him the day he went to the picnic, and your lies have brought all this disgrace about."

"I assure you it was not so. I never said a word to—"

"You own you walked with him, then?"

"I did," said Noddy, quietly; "but—"

"O, you did! Vastly fine! You did! Mrs. Muciller's upper-servant and parlor maid walked out for an airing with Mrs. Muciller's guest! Indeed. Cat!" and Mrs. Muciller bent herself forward, the better to project her indignation. "Leave the room without a word, or I may forget my own interest, and, once out of the house, may be fool enough to forbid your return, even to such a reception as I can give you. Go!"

Noddy was too angry to cry. She went. Mrs. Muciller's words were too unjust to stab. No one knew their injustice better than Noddy. The one bit of truth that she had taken a walk with Mr. Geogagan, she was not ashamed of. Mrs. Muciller's deduction from it, about it's being the means of breaking off Julia's expected match, needed no contradiction. Noddy knew that and what is more, that her step-mother knew it too. The mistake of women's disputes in their predilection for hanging a quarrel on any peg but the right one. Had Mrs. Muciller confined herself to saying she hated Noddy, and always had done so, she would have been completely justified, and would have succeeded in making her victim cry.

The 7.15 train set Noddy down at a little country station, in the middle of the New Forest, amid a wilderness of tree-beauty, with no other habitation in sight for miles than the station-master's house and the long red roofs of Lyndhurst Union peering out from the distant green. The air was scented with flowers, and musical with bird-voices, and the golden evening haze lay on all the sombre trees, and burned them into a red misty glory. A few minutes, and a shaggy pony became visible drawing a small phaeton out of the forest shade. The man drove up, and asked for Miss Cray.

"No luggage, mum, I think? No. Perhaps you won't mind sittin' by me. The road is roughish, and the front seat is more springy."

So Noddy perched herself beside the coachman, and the shaggy pony began a shuffling sort of running trot, and the "carriage" began to glide and bump over the grassy forest-path.

"How far is Pinewood?" Noddy inquired.

"A matter of five mile, mum,—miss, I should say,—"but the road is a rum un."

So it seemed. Over humps and bumps in the lawny way, and the forest-path twisting and winding about among the majestic trees; the wheels singing pleasantly on the grass, grating a stone here and there, or going over a bough yonder, but the pony shuffled along over everything with a happy see-saw swaying of his head.

"Are they at home?"

"Yes'm,—leastways, miss."

"Who did you say your master was?" Noddy wanted to know something of the folks she was going to.

"I didn't say he was no one, did I? He thought this too sharp, however; for he added, "He's the govenor,—that's what he is."

"And the child?" asked Noddy, a little rebuffed. "A girl, I suppose?"

The coachman looked at her severely. "No," he said, doggedly; "it ain't a girl. Come up Peg, can't you!" the last remark being addressed in a surly tone to the pony.

It was getting dusk when Noddy arrived. She was shown into a spacious room comfortably furnished, but plenty of room to walk about.

The windows looked out on the billowy forest, now fading into purple gloom, all save the nearer trees, which stood in a silhouette of black lackwork against the twilight sky. Presently, an old lady in black silk entered the room. Not the lady of the house, Noddy judged,—more like a motherly housekeeper than that; but there was a comfortable smile on her face as she said, "Miss Cray, I believe,—in answer to the letter? Will you follow me, my dear?"

Noddy followed her out of the room, and along a cool white hall, to a door. The old lady knocked. "My master is within; please to enter."

Master! thought Noddy, and trembled at the prospect of the approaching ordeal; but the housekeeper had opened the door, and Noddy had to go in. The room was larger than the other; it was also darker, inasmuch as the blinds were half-way down and no lights to enliven the gloom. Noddy could only distinguish dimly the figure of a man, in a great chintz-covered easy-chair at the far end of the room. She judged him to be elderly by his reclining as if with gout, his legs making two great bolster like parcels in front of him. The hair that strayed out beneath his velvet skull-cap appeared white, and he addressed her in a slow voice of some firmness. "Be seated Miss Cray, if you please."

Nora took a seat.

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